

SENATE RESOLUTION 152

By Dixon

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend those students and journalists who participated in the civil rights sit-ins at the Memphis public libraries upon the occasion of the 44th anniversary of this monumental event.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that members of this General Assembly should pay tribute to those exemplary individuals who have worked to advance the ongoing struggle for civil and human rights and promote racial equality in our society; and

WHEREAS, on March 19, 1960, a laudable group of students and journalists in Memphis placed themselves at the vanguard of progress when they helped launch the heroic movement that led to the integration of public institutions and facilities; and

WHEREAS, upon the occasion of the 44th anniversary of this remarkable event, these courageous individuals deserve the praise and thanks of this legislative body and the good people of the State of Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, the first public tribute for this landmark event will occur at 1 p.m. on Sunday, March 28, 2004, at the Mount Olive C.M.E. Cathedral in Memphis, Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, forty-one individuals were arrested on March 19, 1960, for participating in the Memphis sit-in; the incarcerated group included students from Owen Junior College and LeMoyne College and five journalists; and

WHEREAS, these brave souls were arrested at two Memphis public libraries, the Main Library and the Cossitt Branch, for protesting the segregation laws that denied African-Americans entry to public libraries; and

WHEREAS, these individuals were arrested for entering the segregated libraries and sitting down at tables on the premises; and

WHEREAS, while many sit-ins across the nation focused on integrating lunch counters, the March 19th sit-in was unique in its focus on equal access to public libraries; and

WHEREAS, the arrests of these students and journalists served to unite the Memphis community; nearly 2,000 citizens showed their support of the unjustly jailed heroes at services and meetings at the Mt. Olive C.M.E. Cathedral in the days following the arrests; and

WHEREAS, one service was led by the Reverend David S. Cunningham who noted "our children have been locked up in jail not because they are criminals, but because they have tried to gain their rights. We have no guns and bayonets. We are fighting with prayer"; and

WHEREAS, the Memphis Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) also played an essential role in supporting and securing the release of the demonstrators; in addition to providing legal services for the unfairly incarcerated, the NAACP helped finance the exorbitant bail to free the students and journalists; and

WHEREAS, many of the demonstrators' attorneys, who worked pro bono throughout the movement, later became judges, including Judges Russell Sugarmon, H.T. Lockard, and Odell Horton, and Reverend Benjamin L. Hooks, who later served as FCC Chairman and NAACP Chairman of the Board; and

WHEREAS, following their arrest and subsequent release, the demonstrators continued their dedicated and determined service to the civil rights movement by participating in other sit-ins and non-violent protests; and

WHEREAS, among the distinguished alumni of LeMoyne College who participated in the March 19th sit-in are: The Honorable Olly Rogers Neal (Arkansas Court of Appeals Judge); Josephine Isabel-Jones, MD (Pediatric Cardiologist at UCLA Medical School); Jesse E. Jones (U.S. Air Force Intelligence, retired); The Honorable Marion S. Barry (former Mayor of Washington, D.C.); Willie Shotwell (Director of Human Resources at Federal Express, retired); Ernestine Hill Carpenter (Principal, Memphis City Schools, retired); Clyde Emerson Battles (Professor, LeMoyne-Owen College and internationally acclaimed tenor); Mattie M. Daniels (Ph.D., Educator, retired); Elmer Moore, Jr. (Entrepreneur, Metro Realty); Johnnie Rodgers Turner (NAACP Executive Secretary); and Grace Austin Meacham (Educator, Memphis City Schools); and

WHEREAS, other sit-in participants included students Doris Townsel Bethea, Rosetta Jean Bonds, Parolee Holt Boone, Amanda Battles Carpenter, Ernest Carpenter, Sr., Juanita Harbor Coleman, Chester L. Collins, Evander Ford, Jr., Gwendolyn Glover, J. Melvin Greer, Ernestine Lee Henning, T.C. Heard, Carole Hooks Higgs, John Anderson Hooks, RosaLee Ingram, Katie Robertson Mallory, Laverda Bradford McGee, Katie Whitfield McMurtrey, Eddie Charles Meacham, Johnnie Mae Naylor, Emilyn Harris Palmer, Charles Patterson, Ed Smith, Jean Wiggins Smith, Vinnie Johnson Smith, Allen W. Stiles, Peggy Wiggins Townsend, Dorothy Truitt Walk, Theodore "Teddy" Wells, and James Wilhite, and journalists George Hardin (editor), Robert Morris (photographer), Lutrelle F. Palmer (editor), Ernest C. Withers (photographer), and Burleigh Hines, Jr. (photographer); and

WHEREAS, the preservation of our civil rights and our liberties is essential to the well-being of a democratic society, and the dedication that these individuals have shown to this cause merits special recognition; and

WHEREAS, our society has been undeniably and infinitely improved due to the tireless and selfless efforts of those individuals who were involved in the March 19th sit-ins at the Memphis libraries and those individuals who supported the demonstrators during their judicial proceedings and throughout the civil rights movement; and

WHEREAS, these individuals have demonstrated the spirit and commitment that this General Assembly most admires, and we are proud to pause in our deliberations to recognize their gallant efforts on the 44th anniversary of this landmark event; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we commend those individuals who participated in the sit-ins on March 19th, 1960, in Memphis, thank them for their laudable service to the good people of this State and this Nation, and extend to them our best wishes for continued success in all their future endeavors.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that upon the occasion of the 44th anniversary of the Memphis sit-ins, we specially recognize the first public tribute to this event, which will be held on March 28th, 2004, at Mt. Olive C.M.E. Cathedral.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.